THE OMITTED NAME

Showing That the Poor Rule Still Works.

By Frank B. Elser



"HELEN," HE SAID, ABRUPTLY, WHEN TEA, ENGLISH MUFFINS AND MARMALADE HAD BEEN WHEELED TO THEM, "YOUR FATHER HATES ME."

JAMES JOSIAH RANDERS had attained what folks sometimes call the apex of finance. He had reached that altitude by means of his own ladder, which he purposed to drag up after him, silently. If he chose he would up-end the ladder and balance thereon like the sailor equilibrist at the circus, thereby attaining a plane one better than the apex. But if he did so it would be without summoning the press. What, if anything, he had to confide to the public about his vast affairs reached the newspapers in the form of a meager typewritten statement distributed through his private secretary by messenger. From his luxurious office reporters, one and all, were barred for all time. Mr. Randers called them "vipers of the press," and he meant it.

Yet it was a rare day when the name Randers did not appear in print. His power was so potent, his influence so great, his fortune so swollen that, without it few chronicles of events in the financial world were complete. Moreover, there was the socially important Mrs. Randers and a particular lovely daughter, Helen. Concerning them much appeared in the social columns. To Mrs. Randers this had at first been gratifying, but now she lamented with her husband the increasing tendency of the press to hound the wealthy. And when he said, as he often did, that he wished there was some way of enjoining the whole kit and boodle from ever printing the name Randers again she breathed a fervent amen. Upon these outbursts Helen Randers usually smiled, a bit indulgently for a girl of twenty-one.

Richard Bibley Van Kleeck had never done anything in particular. He didn't have to. Having that name and a decent income, he had tried nearly all of the quasi-professional occupations so popular with young New Yorkers of his type; and his popularity had increased as his business ventures dwindled. In the opinion of his many friends he had seen so much of life in his twenty-five years that if death had yawned at him he would have yawned back.

Not that the was yawning just now. He was standing by the desk of Burton, the city editor, in the local room of the New York Star, waiting like the cubbiest of cubs for his first assignment. They had known each other—he and Burton—for years.

"Well, Van," the city editor queried, dryly, "how in the name of Peter Stuyvesant did you ever get the newspaper bug?"

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"YOU are more or less wrong," answered Richard Bibley Van Kleeck; "I haven't got the newspaper bug. I've simply got a hankering to put one over without trading on what my folks were during the Van Buren administration."

"I get you," said Burton. "You sound like Frank Ward O'Malley or Irvin Cobb, or some other illustrious expatriate of Park Row."

"I never plagiarize," said Richard. "What am I to do?"

"Your first duty," said the city editor with serious frivolity, "will be to skip down to the southwest corner of Wall and Nassau streets, take the elevator to the seventeenth floor and obtain there an interview with our popular fellow townsman, Mr. James Josiah Randers."

"Don't kid me," said Richard. "I know the old gentleman. In fact, I know his daughter."

"Of course you do," retorted Burton. "That's why I'm giving you the assignment."

A frown touched Richard Van Kleeck's clean-cut face. "That's the sort of stuff I wanted to get away from," he said after awhile. "You see, Burton——"

"Don't be foolish," broke in the city editor. "You'd sell him a bond, wouldn't you? Transact any decent sort of business with him, wouldn't you? Why balk at an interview just because you happen to know him socially—and his daughter? This g-r-e-a-t profession of ours must not stop at——"

Richard held up his stick as if to ward off a blow. "You're conning me something terrible, Steve," he said, grimacing. "But I'll go. What shall I talk to him about?"

"About Consolidated Suburban Traction." Burton handed him a clipping. "Read this on your way down; it's interesting."

Richard saluted with his stick, and was gone.

Now, it was one thing to have intimate pleasurable knowlege of the changing blue of Helen Randers' eyes and quite another thing to know the idiosyncrasies of her father's business life. Of the rebuffs veteran reporters had met at the hands of James Josiah Randers in the past Richard knew nothing. His chief concern, as he swung southward along Broadway, was whether Helen, with her keen sense of humor, would interpret to his credit or discredit this latest tack in his career.

Arrived at that great pile of white stone a hundred yards east of Trinity Church, a racing-car of an elevator shot him skyward, and before he had framed his questions he had passed the outer corral of mahogany and entered the great man's office.

"Mr. Randers," he began after they had shaken hands cordially, "whether your secretary told you or not, I came here to interview you for the New York Star."

The great mahogany chair built especially for James Josiah Randers creaked as he leaned forward. "Richard," he said impressively, "to my knowledge nobody ever gained anything by practical jokes. Now what is it?"

Richard drew from his waistcoat pocket the clipping Burton had given him, and spread it between his fingers. "What I should like to get," he explained, "is a chatty little interview with you on the Consolidated Suburban Traction situation. My city editor would appreciate a good talk."

Mr. Randers had always liked Richard, and for probably a quarter of a minute he regarded him calmly and hopefully, waiting for the smile that would brand it all a joke. But Richard did not smile. He merely stood there, the clipping between his fingers, waiting for Mr. Randers to reply.

The great mahogany chair creaked again. James Josiah had risen to his feet. His face was the color of a Harvard pennant. His right arm was raised menacingly.

"Young man," he roared, "are you crazy?"

"Not that I know of," replied the young man.

"Then why this unheard-of impertinence?"

"This is business," protested Richard. "I came here to interview you. This g-r-e-a-t profession of ours——"

"Rats!" snorted Mr. Randers. "If you've really become a reporter for that yellow rag of a Star, you've got less sense than I credited you with. I have standing orders here that no reporters are to be admitted on any pretext. If you are in earnest you know where the door is."

Richard thrust the clipping carefully back into his pocket.

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"I'M downright sorry you take it so hard," he said. "I'll be up to see Helen Wednesday night, and maybe when you've had your dinner and are feeling better we can discuss the ethics of the situation."

"In my house," shouted James Josiah Randers, "reporters are as unwelcome as they are in my office. If you have an engagement with my daughter for Wednesday night you will consider it broken."

Richard bowed and backed toward the door. His face was a bit flushed.

"You will do me a great favor," Mr. Randers fired after him, "to keep my name out of your publication. If consistent, pass the word along."

Half an hour later Richard sat swinging a leg off the city desk at the Star.

"Burton," he said, "I have obtained from our fellow townsman, Mr. James Josiah Randers, one of the hottest little interviews ever pulled off by a New York reporter."

"What! You got away with it?"

"I got away."

"With any facts at all?"

"With the fact that I'm queered with the Randers."

"Shucks," grumbled the city editor. "I thought you knew him so well!"

"I know him better now," Richard assured him. "On what joyous little errand would you have me journey forth next?"

"I don't think of anything else in your particular line this afternoon," drawled Burton—"that is, unless you can suggest some other interview."

"I am in deep thought," said Richard. "It occurs to me that there is another member of the Randers family whom I might——"

"Beat it," laughed The Desk.

From the corner settee in the tearoom at the Ritz, Richard Van Kleeck rose at one minute after 4 o'clock that afternoon to greet a girl who was a girl. When Richard had met her three years before they had looked at each other strangely and smiled. And when they had found a window seat they had again looked at each other strangely and smiled. Then each had repeated, 'way down where one repeats, that love-at-first-sight formula: "Well, I didn't know exactly how you'd look, but this is you."

"Helen," he said abruptly, when tea and English muffins and marmalade had been wheeled before them, "your father hates me."

"Why?" she queried, puzzled, smiling.

"Because I have become a viper of the press."

"You're making fun of him," said the girl coloring. She had often heard her father use the words.

"No, I'm not. I took a job with the Star today."

Helen let her hands fall helplessly into her lap and regarded him with a faint, quizzical smile.

"Dick, won't you ever settle down?" she asked rather tremulously. "You owe it to me. Surely, you're not going to be an ordinary reporter on a New York newspaper?"

"Ordinary? I went down today to interview your father.'

"Dick, are you crazy?"

"You and he have been comparing notes," he commented mildly.

Helen flushed. "Don't you know he eats reporters?"

"I do now," said Richard grimly. "Until today I had only a vague notion of the intensity of that appetite."

"And are you angry and hurt?" she asked.

"No." Richard spoke slowly. "If your father doesn't want his name in the papers that's his business." He paused. "Are you angry and hurt because I did it?"

"That's a foolish question, Dick. I was disappointed at first. But if you're sincere——" She gazed at him questioningly.

"Helen, no man knows what he can do best until he tries," he said earnestly. "I'm not sure of anything in this world except that I love you."

The girl leaned toward him and impulsively placed a little hand in his. "No matter what happens," she whispered, "I'd rather have the tiniest chair in a Harlem flat with you than every seat on the stock exchange with any other man I ever saw. But please hurry up."

He squeezed her little hand until she winced and withdrew it.

"Tell me," she said, "why do the newspapers—'hound us,' as father expresses it?"

"Because the name Randers means potential news. It's one of the curses of being powerful and socially important, and, in your case, wonderful and beautiful and sweet and lovely and the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James Josiah Randers."

She pursed her red lips in thought. Then, "If I were a newspaper editor," she said simply, "and father treated my men as I know he treats all reporters, I'd get hopping mad myself and never print his name again."

Richard smiled. "The editor's revenge," he said, "is not in silence but in screaming headlines."

"Then you'll try again to interview him?"

"The only thing I ever expect to interview him about again is a girl named Helen."

She blushed prettily and fingered her furs on a chair beside her. Then: "It's nearly 6. The car is waiting. I must be going."

Radiant she faced him as he stood, hat in hand, by the door of the limousine. "Wednesday night," she said gayly, "we'll map out plans that will make Mr. Hearst look like the editor of a farmer's almanac. Come early."

Richard's breath whipped in sharply. Wednesday night—he had intended telling her all her father had said. Obviously the sidewalk was no place to do it now. "Helen, mine is a morning paper," he said in some confusion. "I'll probably have to work Wednesday night. Besides, before I call again, I think you'd better have a talk with your father."

Before she could protest he had bowed and swung off toward 5th avenue.

"Well," she gasped. "Home," she said to the chauffeur and settled back among her white furs.

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HIS night assignment covered, Richard and his city editor lunched together in the restaurant for employes on the fourteenth floor of the Star building.

"Still sore about Randers?" inquired Burton.

"Me—sore? Not at all. You fellows are the goats," said Richard. "From what I gather the old gentleman has been booting you out for years, and you not only go back for more but cling to the delusion that no story below Fulton street can be written without his name. Know what I'd do?"

"No, what?" Burton checked a sandwich in midair.

"Cut him out absolutely. Put an embargo on the name Randers for six months—a year—two years, if necessary."

Burton put the sandwich carefully back on his plate, and shot Richard a look of pity. Then he laughed goodhumoredly.

"Revengeful youth," he said melodramatically, "I thought you weren't sore."

"I'm not; and the idea isn't even original."

"And it would be about as popular with the newspapers as evening dress in Canal street at high noon. Might as well suggest cutting out base ball."

"In reply to which," returned Richard, lighting a cigarette, "I say tommyrot. It can be done."

"How?"

"Get together. Quarantine him. All the papers agree not to print the name Randers till he hollers 'nough. Stick to it, and I'll guarantee results. Teach him once and for all that this g-r-e-a-t profession of ours——"

Burton hit the table a whack with his open palm. "By thunder, Van," he cried, "I believe it'll work! If there's any sand in the rest of the papers we'll have the man without a country looking like an also-ran."

"You boil quickly," Richard remarked. "On the level, you'll try it?"

"Try it? Do it! Great conference of editors at luncheon. As father of the idea you are invited. I outline the plan, tersely, lucidly. Cheers. The question: 'Shall the New York press, crushed for years under the heel of James Josiah Randers, turn and sting him in his only vulnerable spot—his bump of importance?' More cheers. The vote: Ah! The ayes have it overwhelmingly. The embargo is on!"

Burton stopped, out of breath. "And Miss Randers?" He raised his eyebrows.

"Will be tickled to death," replied Richard. "It is her suggestion."

Only those whose privilege it has been to gaze behind the headlines into the field of the Fourth Estate, where the public cow seldom grazes, know anything about the famous luncheon at which an amused, albeit determined, set of editors voted unanimously not to print the name of James Josiah Randers, nor his wife, nor his daughter, nor his stocks nor his bonds, nor anything that was his. The plan went into effect forthwith, a decision happily timed, for that night Mrs. Randers gave at her town house a reception and cotillon of unusual elaborateness.

We'll skip the cotillon, mentioning only that Richard Bibley Van Kleeck was not present, and, if you are not fastidious, will enter the boudoir of Mrs. Randers on the following morning.

The breakfast tray removed, she settled herself comfortably among the pillows to read with inward satisfaction and outward protest what the writers on social affairs had to say of her as hostess. In her hands was the Herald. She was subtly familiar with every division and subdivision of its society page; her practiced eye took in seven columns at a glance. Therefore she ahemmed impatiently and turned to the page following. Doubtless, she reasoned, the affair had been given so much space that it had been put on a page apart from the society items. But as she scanned the next and the next and the next page a queer look came over the lady's face, and, squeaking chagrin, she threw the Herald to the floor, laughed nervously and rang for her maid.

"Bring me the other morning papers," she commanded; "all of them." The maid did so quickly and left the room.

Mrs. Randers opened the Times, only to discard it with a gasp, as if it had stung her. In truth it had. Her breathing was a bit labored now, and with fingers that trembled she began searching the other papers. In her desperation even the want ad columns did not escape her. But the quest was fruitless. The name Randers did not appear once. The cotillon had been ignored.

Mrs. Randers swept the litter to the floor and sank limply back among the pillows.

"Mother, what in the world is the matter?"

Startled, Helen Randers stood in the doorway.

Something that might have been a homeopathic groan came from among the pillows. Helen, now quite alarmed, ran to the bedside. Her glance caught the jumble of papers on the floor.

"Oh, mother," she exclaimed, "why do you let these newspaper articles get on your nerves? Let them print what they want."

"Have you seen the papers?" This from the pillows.

"No."

"Well, we're insulted—insulted by every paper in the city," Mrs. Randers sat up by way of emphasis.

Helen snatched up the Herald. "What have they printed?" she cried.

"Nothing!" This weakly from the pillows.

Helen Randers gasped. "Nothing?"—she queried incredulously—"the papers have printed nothing—about—the—cotillion?" Her face had the look of a child challenging a fairy tale.

Mrs. Randers nodded.

The Herald slipped from Helen's fingers. Her eyes were flashing mischief. For an instant she turned her face away. Then she bent over her mother.

"No wonder you're overcome," she said. "They let us alone at last. We're free—free from the vipers of the press. Hooray! Won't father be happy! How gratified you must be."

Mrs. Randers sighed. "I'm most gratified, my dear," she said. "And your father will, of course, be greatly relieved."

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WHEN James Josiah Randers reached his office that morning, an hour before his wife was awake, he saw things with the exaggerated clearness that comes with loss of sleep. Today he saw with particular vividness that the time was at hand for floating the fifty-million-dollar bond issue of Consolidated Suburban Traction.

In a two years' secret campaign Mr. Randers had acquired control of 500 miles of tottering street-car lines tributary to New York. Scattered through a dozen different companies, with most of which passing a dividend had come a habit, the securities had in the past been kicked about among the cats and dogs of the curb. But when Consolidated Suburban Traction was born with a capitalization of one hundred million common and fifty million preferred stock, there was a scramble of the minority to swap old lamps for new—at a ratio satisfactory to Mr. Randers. Pending the bond issue no improvements had been made, but the common, first offered at 75, had risen steadily from the moment of its listing on the exchange. The magic name Randers had worked wonders.

"When the common hits par and the preferred 125," mused Mr. Randers, as he entered his office, "we'll put out the bond circulars."

He went straight to the stock ticker. C. S. T. had opened strong at 98. His brokers had been instructed to put it up to par before the close. At wash sales they were experts.

Mr. Randers smiled as he sat down at his broad desk. He pawed over some papers. Then, "Dunwoodie," he called sharply to his secretary, "where are the clippings?"

"On your desk, sir, in the usual place."

"I don't mean the business clippings, but that social rot."

Mr. Dunwoodie came nearer, cautiously. "I can't understand it, sir," he said. "There weren't any. May I ask, was the er—a—cotillon postponed?"

Mr. Randers wheeled like a locomotive on a turntable and stabbed Mr. Dunwoodie with a glare. "Dunwoodie," he inquired crushingly, "haven't you read the papers?"

"Thoroughly," sir," replied the secretary, getting red. "There was nothing about the affair."

"What!"

"Nothing," repeated Mr. Dunwoodie, doggedly.

The face of James Josiah Randers was a study. A hot wave of anger swept from his gaitered feet to his massive head. Yet, save for a fleeting compression of the lips his heavy features gave no hint of his emotion.

"Well," he burst out after a moment, "for once those vipers have let us alone."

"I'm afraid they have." Mr. Dunwoodie spoke earnestly.

"Afraid!" Mr. Randers fairly sprawled on the opportunity to let the jacket of his anger burst. "Afraid, you simpleton! Don't you know I have been fighting for years to keep my name out of these scurrilous sheets? This is a victory!"

Mr. Dunwoodie said something inarticulate to show that he had been hep all along, and withdrew. He was glad to get away from there.

Left alone, Mr. Randers seized the stack of clippings—the financial clippings, minus that "social rot." Here, at any rate, in the Wall street reviews, the name Randers would recur with satisfying annoyance. He chose from the lot a column article on Consolidated Suburban Traction. As he ran his eye down the clipping his face grew grave. Something was surely wrong. Instead of the name Randers speckling sentence and paragraph there appeared such watery phrases as this:

"A well known banking house;" "a financier of international reputation;" "an operator known for his foresight and astuteness;" "a prominent interest heretofore identified with this undertaking."

Mr. Randers laid the clipping down with a deliberateness unusual to him. He picked up another. A glance showed that it was likewise mysteriously expurgated. Beads of perspiration popped out on Mr. Randers' forehead.

The telephone rang. "Hello, Randers." It was the voice of an old associate in the Street. "Who's sick at your house?"

"Nobody," snapped Mr. Randers. "Who said there was?"

"Nobody." The voice was cheerful. "I thought maybe that was the reason your wife's affair was called off last night!"

"Who said it was called off?"

"Nobody. But the papers haven't got a line about it, and my natural inference was——"

"Hang the papers," bellowed Mr. Randers.

"It is an outrage." The voice was sympathetic.

"Get me right," shot back Mr. Randers, unconsciously slangy in his fury, "I don't want my name in the papers. Good-by."

He swung fiercely about from the telephone and glowered at the heavy rug on the floor. Panics, he knew, had followed the wake of punier rumors than reports of illness in a capitalist's family. Many a bear raid had sprung from a germ less fertile than the omission of his name in connection with the C. S. T.

It was an oversight of course. The next sheet of typewritten flimsy issuing from his office would be seized upon and played up by the newspapers as in the past. That he had been right in his attitude toward the press admitted of no argument. The man who talked much lost his power of emphasis; the biggest headlines were built over scant material from potential sources usually dry. Witness the case of his friend down the street, who regarded all reporters as pirates and was besieged by forty of them every time he departed for or returned from Europe.

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DEBATE of this kind, however, is not satisfying. James Josiah Randers rose guiltily from his desk, and looked gloomily out the window.

Mr. Dunwoodie re-entered, cautiously. There was a white ring around the young man's mouth. Apparently he had something to say. But Mr. Randers dismissed him with a scowl. Closing his huge right fist until the knuckles popped protestingly, he crossed over to the stock ticker. C. S. T. was down three points.

Mr. Randers was on the point of rushing to the telephone to demand of his brokers why his orders had miscarried when the financial news ticker at his elbow rasped nervously and clicked a purple line of "testing, testing, testing" across the broad white ribbon of paper. Irritated, he was about to turn away, when the spinning lettered wheel swung back to marginal alignment and printed out a word that held his attention. The word spelled, letter by letter, was J-a-m-e-s. Following quickly then J-o-s-i-a-h, and inevitably, R-a-n-d-e-r-s. It was the next word, however, that caused the financier to snort. It was h-e-a-l-t-h. The ticker always omits the apostrophe. The full subhead was—

James Josiah Randers health.

Under it came this:

"Rumors of the sudden illness of Mr. Randers, although met with prompt denials at his office today, caused marked uneasiness in the stock market. This coupled with rumors that there was some change in the plans for financing C. S. T. brought a sharp decline in that stock."

Mr. Randers did not wait for more. He jabbed viciously a mother-o'-pearl button labeled "Stenographer," and when a young man hurried into the room it was to receive a rapidly dictated statement, also under a subhead. The subhead, worded by Mr. Randers himself, was "To the Press." This was the statement:

"Based apparently on the omission by the newspapers of accounts of certain entirely private social affairs at the home of James Josiah Randers, malicious rumors have sprung up regarding Mr. Randers' health and the management of certain properties with which he is identified. Mr. Randers, when seen at his office today, was in the best of health. He took occasion to deny that there had been any change in the plans for reorganizing and financing Consolidated Suburban Traction, and added that he would soon issue a statement giving full details of the proposed bond issue."

"Tell Dunwoodie to give that to the reporters," he directed. "Make plenty of copies and see that they all get it."

Less than ten minutes later telephone bells were jangling in the financial bureaus of fifteen newspapers. Mr. Dunwoodie was announcing that an important statement from James Josiah Randers was then on the way by messenger. He had always enjoyed making these announcements; but the first comment he heard now made him wince. The second he interpreted as a joke. The third left him stunned. "Randers, you say? Thanks, old man. No hurry about it, though. Don't bother with a messenger. Mail it to the office."

Meanwhile the market was breaking badly. In Wall street rumor does the hundred in ten flat. Mr. Randers had been variously assassinated, sent to Matteawan, killed in an elevator smash; had died suddenly of apoplexy, eloped with Norma Talmadge. His brokers, instructed to take every share of C. S. T. offered, braced themselves for the onslaught only to be swept off their feet by the flood of selling orders that poured on the floor. Lambs and professionals alike were unloading. Before Dunwoodie had stumbled from the telephone booth, the last of the reporters' languid comments stinging his numb brain, the stock had dropped ten points.

Mr. Randers stood at the stock ticker, feeding the tape through his fingers. Before his eyes Consolidated Suburban Traction was resuming its former junk-pile rating. In his vaults were fifty millions in bonds to be floated on a rising market. They would float now—like mad.

Dunwoodie entered. He was making a queer noise in his throat. Mr. Randers looked up, a question in his frown.

"I—I—notified all the newspapers," faltered the secretary.

"Those were my instructions," returned Mr. Randers coldly. "Why annoy me further about it?"

Mr. Dunwoodie looked at his employer helplessly. His throat hurt him.

"Speak," boomed Mr. Randers.

Mr. Dunwoodie swallowed. "They don't want it," he said bluntly. He had intended saying something else, more diplomatic; but, after all, that was the simplest.

A mass of ticker tape fell writhing at James Josiah Randers' feet.

"What did you say?" he demanded hoarsely.

"They turned your statement down." Mr. Dunwoodie spoke hollowly. He recoiled as he spoke. He had never seen Mr. Randers look as he looked now. The great man's cheeks were ashen.

A statement from James Josiah Randers refused by the press! It was impossible. Moore than that—it was uncanny. Mr. Randers blinked a moment in dazed perplexity, and then, as the color returned to his face, he clenched his jaw in firm resolve. Let 'em throw C. S. T. overboard—the fools! He'd stem the deluge, if it cost him five millions. Orders to this effect on his lips, he reached for the telephone. Yet he hesitated. The bonds—what a black eye for them! He might as well get at the root of the evil now. Something was surely rotten in the Fourth Estate.

"Dunwoodie," he asked suddenly, "did you phone all the papers?"

"Yes, sir; all of them."

"The Star?"

"Yes, sir."

"The downtown bureau or the main office?"

"The financial bureau downtown."

Mr. Randers lowered his gaze, something he seldom did. He moistened his lips. "Call up the Star's main office," he said heavily. "Ask for Mr. Richard Bibley Van Kleeck. Put him on my private wire."

As Mr. Dunwoodie bolted through the door Mr. Randers turned again to the stock ticker. C. S. T. was sloughing off between sales. The ticker rasped hard to keep up:

"C. S. T., 1,000/80; C. S. T., 500/79⅞; 2,000/80; 1,500/79¾; 5,000/79; 3,000/78¼; 5,000/76; 3,000/74½; 10,000/70.

Mr. Randers groaned. It was slaughter.

Mr. Dunwoodie was back in a minute and a half. "Not in," he said briefly.

Mr. Randers scowled. "Where is he?"

"I didn't ask, sir."

"Well, find out."

Mr. Dunwoodie was back in a minute. "At the Ritz," he announced, breathing hard.

"Get him!"

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A SMARTLY dressed page moved gracefully in and out among the luncheon throng at the Ritz. He held a slip of paper in his right hand, and every now and then he looked at it. Then issued from his lips a sort of subdued cry or whine ending in a rising inflection.

A stunning girl raised her head. "Dick," she said, that's for you. Aren't you important, though, since you became a viper of the press!"

"Publicity is a great thing," said Richard Bibley Van Kleeck. "I do this every day." He beckoned the boy to him. A coin and the slip changed hands as if by rehearsal, and Richard, with a murmured apology, stared at it, puzzled.

"Not my office," he said. He read aloud: "Call 2356 Rector at once. Important."

"Father's office number," exclaimed the girl.

Richard looked at her sharply. "I hope our meeting here hasn't caused any rumpus," he said.

"Rumpus—over me? He probably wants to thank you."

"For what?"

A wisp of a smile touched Helen's lips; but she made no answer. "Anyway, hurry up and telephone," she ordered. "And if it's father himself be sweet."

Richard's face was so serious when he returned from the telephone that she rose involuntarily and asked:

"Is he ill?"

"No. It's the newspapers."

"Don't teas " she fretted. "Surely, he doesn't understand and appreciate——" She hesitated; her blue eyes met his squarely.

"He certainly appreciates it. He has asked me to come down to his office at once," Richard said, soberly.

"Then I'll go, too." She began drawing on her gloves.

It did not daunt her when Richard protested that the journey could be made quickest by subway. She was seated by his side as they roared out of the station. Richard picked at the cleats on the car floor with his stick. Presently he took a piece of copy paper from his pocket and wrote something on it. Then he folded it carefully and thrust it into his waistcoat pocket.

During the twelve minutes or less that the express rushed toward the overweighted tip of Manhattan James Josiah Randers stood by his desk, watch in hand. He had ceased to look at the ticker. There wasn't any use. The last C. S. T. quotation noted was forty-seven, a drop of fifty-one points since the opening. There had been nothing like it since the Hocking crash. As each succeeding strip recorded further sickening descents, Mr. Randers spared himself the agony of looking.

He stood like a man the police had put through the third degree. On his desk was a pile of afternoon papers. He had combed them all. The name he sought was missing. Ponderously dejected rather than infuriated, he began pacing up and down the room. The door marked "Private" opened so softly that he did not see Dick and Helen enter, and he stopped only when the girl ran forward with a little cry.

"Father," she exclaimed, "you look ill."

At the sound of her voice, Mr. Randers gurgled in astonishment, then, turning, caught her in his arms.

"Nonsense, my dear," he muttered as he kissed her. "Are these wild rumors to be credited by members of my own family?"

Helen laughed. "Wild rumors" had no significance for her. She was relieved; her father was not ill. "I just came with him," she said abruptly irrelevant. She nodded toward Dick, who stood aloof.

Mr. Randers bowed heavily in embarrassment.

"I asked Mr. Van Kleeck to come here on a matter of urgent business," he finally managed to say. "If you will excuse us, my dear——"

"I won't!" pouted Helen. "I left a perfectly good luncheon to dash down here. Besides, I want you to thank us for keeping your name out of the papers. I suggested it, you know."

* * * *

SLAPPED with the suddenness of this, Mr. Randers blurted out the first ill-chosen words that came to his mind. "You!" he cried. "Why, my poor deluded little daughter, I sent for Richard to get my name in the papers." He looked at the young man appealingly. "Richard," he asked solemnly, "what do you know about this conspiracy? It will ruin me." He waved a hand toward a tangle of ticker tape.

While Helen's blue eyes widened, Richard Bibley Van Kleeck replied, "I wouldn't call it exactly a conspiracy, Mr. Randers. As I understand it, the editors thought it best not to molest you further, in view of your well known antipathy to the press."

"And Helen?" Mr. Randers looked at his pretty daughter wonderingly.

"Mentioned casually that you would of course be pleased to have your long-cherished hope for privacy gratified." Helen nodded in naive ratification.

Mr. Randers' big hands fell at his sides. His mouth opened like an astounded youth's. Then, all pride having fled, there was suddenly born to him a sixth sense—humor. He threw back his head and laughed.

Helen and Richard laughed, too, until the great man laid a hand on Richard's shoulder. "Richard," he said, suddenly, "I need a press agent. Need him bad. Do you think you can get a statement from me in the next editions?"

Richard drew from his waistcoat pocket and handed to Mr. Randers a folded sheet of copy paper. It was the sheet on which he had written in the subway. "Here is a preliminary statement," he said simply, "which I believe will lift the quarantine."

While Helen, curious, looked over her father's shoulder, James Josiah Randers read: "Mr. and Mrs. James Josiah Randers announce the engagement of their daughter Helen Elizabeth to Mr. Richard Bibley Van Kleeck."

The girl looked up, face crimson. Her eyes, caressing Richard, were a blue he had never seen before.

James Josiah Randers looked grimly at his new press agent. There was a twinkle in his eyes. "If both parties have ratified this statement I see no reason why it should not go out at once," was all he said.

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Lardner Writes of the New York Game of Bridge

TO the editor: Kipling once made the crack that east is east and west is west meaning that they's little in common between the two of them and he was thinking a specially of athaletic events like foot ball and etc. and the differents in how they play them in N. Y. and vicinity and out in the far west like Ohio, California and Missouri.

For inst. if Harvard beats Yale 40 to 0, why both teams wins as its a technical victory for Harvard and a moral victory for Yale, wile out west the nine that gets the most scores is the only winner, except in a case like the 1919 world serious when Cincinnati win technicly, but the fiscal victory roosted under Chicago's pillow.

Or you take track athaletics. They's a boy in California name Paddock



"THERE'S A BOY IN CALIFORNIA NAMED PADDOCK THAT RUN A 100 METERS IN NOTHING."

that run a 100 meters in nothing, but the record don't count down here on acct. of the differents in time and besides if you told a New Yorker about it he would say if Paddock was in such a hurry why didn't he take a taxi.

Or you take poker or the game we use to call by the name poker out in Michigan and Indiana, and only men played it and if you had 2 pair before the draw why you raised the pot and felt like you had better than a even chance to win, but you set in what they call a poker game down here and at least ½ the people in it is of the silly sex and ½ the cards is wild to match the players and if you pick up 2 pair you threw them in the ash can because a straight flush ain't barely enough to stay in on.

* * * *

AND you also take bridge whist. I use to play a game by that name out in Chi and I was a careful bidder and use to let somebody else play some of the hands and when I bid my partner knowed I had something and when I doubled everybody got goose's flesh, and all and all, the boys and gals all said I was a pretty fair bridge player a specially as when trumps had been led around a few times I could generally always figure how many of them was still out yet, so the 1st. time I got invited to play with 3 N. Y. players, why I says, "Yes," without batting a eye because I thought we was all equals and bridge was bridge no matter where you rome.

Well friends, I hadn't no more than set down to the table when I seen that I and N. Y. bridge was alien enemys and the game they play here is as much like our old game out in Chi as 2 liters of home made beer.

In the 1st. place when you set down to play the New York game, you are suppose to discard the genial smile you generally were at other functions amongst the demi-monde and look kind of sullen, like you wished you was elsewheres, rolling a hoop, and it don't make no differents if the other players is Brother Moose, you got to treat them like you had been to Canada with them in a balloon.

If one of them trys to indulge in light chit-chats between deals, shut him up with what ever remark seems appropriate like:

"How funny your Adam's apple flounders around when you talk."

After the table manners and facial expression is mastered, the next thing is the conventions which I only catched on to a few of them to date.

When the dealer starts off with, "One without," it is supposed to be an abbreviation of one without reason, and it means the dealer has got nine high in 3 suits and jacks or better in the other. A plain bid of one club or one diamond means strenth in the other 3 suits, but a bid of one club accompanied by frothing at the mouth indicates a high blood pressure. If the dealer bids 2 of either of these suits it is a hint to take him out as the room is too stuffy. A bid of one spade merely calls attention to a mole or other eye sore belonging to one of the oppts.

* * * *

A bid of one heart don't mean nothing serious unlest gangrene sets in. Two hearts wile useing a hankerchief indicates strenth in the olfactory organs. A double of the two heart bid means you got 13 cards but that ain't enough. A bid of two spades accompanied by planting the feet on the table signifys that dealer is going home after the next rubber.

They's little to the play after the 1st. lead. The man that done the bidding generally always flops all his cards down on the table and says "little slam" and if you question him you get a big slam.

Some times, however, when the bid has been doubled, they don't throw the cards down till 4 or 5 leads has been made and in cases like these the partners is suppose to say anything they can to irritate each other, like for inst. suppose they was a heart led and spades was trumps and your partner didn't have no hearts and slapped a spade down and took the trick. You are suppost to say:

"Haven't you no hearts, partner?" like you thought he was either bleareyed or a moron.

If he leads back the wrong card you say:

"Is that all the better you know how to play partner?"

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AND there's still another convention that is libel to come up several times during the coarse of the evening and that is when your partner gets the bid and gets set 3 or 4 tricks. A dirty look ain't enough to cover this kind of a incidence but should be followed by some such remark like:

"Your a fine cheese partner," or, "Who learnt you to play bridge?"

This is a important convention and they was a Chicago man here a few wks. ago that didn't know about it and when his partner got set 4, why he smiled and says:

"Too bad, partner, but it was my fault for raiseing your bid," and his partner dropped dead and the Chicago man was arrested for murder which is punishable in this state by a $5 fine.

RING W. LARDNER.

Great Neck, May 13.

LISTING INEZ *(Continued)*

distance, you know, even in a crowd. By the time I had walked two blocks up and one down without finding her I suppose I was a little panicky. Anyway, what I said to that bone-headed night watchman who was guarding a pile of bricks and sand wasn't particularly sane.

"You haven't seen my friend Inez, have you?" I asked.

"Which?" says he, through a corncob pipe.

"Big Swede girl with yellow hair?" I adds.

"Oh, that one!" says he. "She ducked across the street, over there. Just missed gettin' bumped by a taxi, too. Red feathers on her hat."

"That's Inez," says I, and darts in the direction he was pointing his thumb.

I could see a house front that was well lighted and a sidewalk canopy set up. Somebody having a coming-out party, or announcing an engagement. And Inez must have seen what she would call "swell people" arriving or going away. That would be enough for her. I should have to talk to Inez again about the danger of trying to rush across 5th avenue hen fashion, without waiting for the traffic lulls. About wandering alone, too, at this hour of the night.

I had gone nearly to the middle of this side street and was almost opposite the canopied entrance, looking into every doorway in the hope of finding Inez staring out from behind a shadow, when I noticed this little group of folks that seem to be milling around so odd and senseless. I caught a glimpse of a podgy little man in evening clothes who was hopping about on his toes as if he was tryin' to jump into his silk hat which he had dropped on the sidewalk. Then there was a large, fat woman with an opera cape hanging from one shoulder and her arms waving wildly as she clawed at a slim young chap who was tugging to get away. Also there was a fellow in a chauffeur's uniform who edged in and then dodged back out of reach. And they were all so busy and silent about it. Not a word spoken. Only now and then a heavy puff, evidently from the fat woman, or a grunt from one of the men. I couldn't make out what it was all about.

Then the slim chap gave a final whirl, hit the fat woman in the chest with his elbow, kicked vicious at the chauffeur, and broke loose completely. He was legging it toward the East river when the screams started. The fat woman had found her voice.

"Police! Police!" she squealed. "He—he's got my jewel bag!"

Even that didn't seem to disturb any one. As a matter of fact, there was nobody in sight to be disturbed. I heard a front window shoved up and then banged down again.

"Stop him! Stop the thief!" shouted the fat woman. "Police!"

But no police came on the run, or even sauntered up. Any more than they would if you'd staged such an affair on Main street in Tamarack Junction when Constable Sol. Heffner was playing pinochle in the back of Feltner's general store. And meanwhile the slim chap was making a speedy getaway

I suppose I was watching him run, kind of excited and nervous, but not thinking of doing anything in particular, and perhaps rather hoping that he wouldn't trip or stub his toe, when I saw a bulky female figure step out directly in his path, open her arms and fold him in. It was almost as though he had jumped through a trap door. Anyway, both of them went down and I could dimly see them rolling about the sidewalk.

"He's caught! He's caught!" shrieks the fat woman, hysterical. "See, See, Junius? Now for heaven's sake do something."

The podgy little man didn't seem so anxious. However, he picked up his silk hat, gave it a hasty brush on his sleeve, and started, with the fat woman, hanging to his arm, her opera cape dragging behind. The chauffeur went along, too. I hadn't been asked, but I fell in behind. I wasn't sure, but there seemed to be something familiar about that husky figure which had folded in the runaway so thoroughly. Of course it might not be Inez——

* * * *

BUT it was. When the four of us reached the spot and surrounded her she had squirmed on top and was sitting jauntily on this perfect stranger, who was considerably flattened amidships and was groaning feebly: "Take her off! Oh, take her off!"

As for Inez, her best hat was a total wreck, one sleeve of her shirt waist was ripped at the shoulder and she was breathing rather heavy.

"Oh, Inez!" says I. "Are you hurt?"

"No," says Inez. "But Aye—Aye swallow my gum."

"You brave, noble girl!" breaks in the fat lady. "You have saved my jewels. See, Junius, he still has the bag in his hand. Take it away from him."

"Yes, my dear," says Junius. "But would it not be better to get an officer first? Otto, see if you cannot find a policeman."

"And leave us at the mercy of this robber?" protests the fat lady. "Why, he might get away."

"Not him!" says Inez, jouncing up and down a little. "Aye got him, all right."

"O-o-o-o!" gurgles the jewel snatcher.

"Don't worry, lady," says I. "He couldn't be safer if he was spiked to the sidewalk. Inez will hold him."

"Then you know this heroic young person?" says she. "Who is she?"

"Miss Inez Petersen," says I. "She's a friend of mine, and there's 180 pounds of her."

"I'll take the car and bring back a cop," volunteers Otto.

It took him nearly ten minutes, at that, but finally he rolled up with one and we helped Inez to her feet while the officer yanked up the breathless thief.

"Huh!" says the policeman. "Slim Joe, eh? Only two months out of Sing Sing and at it again, are you? Well, it's headquarters for yours, Joe."

"Any—anywheres you say," pants Joe. "Only don't let that baby elephant sit on me again."

At that I tried to lead Inez away, but the policeman wouldn't let me. He said she had to go along with the others to tell the chief all about it.

And the next thing I knew they'd all piled into the limousine and were gone. There didn't seem to be room for me, so I walked back to West 57th street and waited. It was a long wait, too. I finished my half of the sandwiches and pickle and had all I could do to keep my teeth out of the rest, for somehow this adventure stuff had worked up an appetite. It got to be 12 o'clock, then half past, and no Inez. I was just beginning to wonder if she had been locked up, too, when I heard her gentle tread on the stairs.

And if it hadn't been for the red feather on the wrecked lid I'd hardly have known her, at that, for she's wearing a gorgeous silk opera cape.

"For the love of Pete!" says I. "Where did you collect that?"

"Miss Junius Stokes, she make me present," announces Inez. "Swell, eh?"

"It's all of that," says I. "But where were you so long?"

"Oh, we go to big place, lotta policemans," says Inez. "Funny talk. They tell me I must go on force to catch thieves."

"There's more truth than comedy about that," says I. "I expect you're hungry, after all that. I saved a sandwich for you."

"Nice man, that Joe," says Inez.

"You mean Junius, I suppose," says I. "Mr. Stokes—the podgy one?"

Inez shakes her head. "He's all right, too," says she, "but Joe, the slim one——" and then she ducks her chin coy.

"Hal-lup!" I gasps. "If she hasn't fallen for the purse snatcher! Say, Inez, haven't you any discretion?"

"He—he got nice eyes," insists Inez.

"Good-night!" says I, meaning every word of it. For 1 a.m. is no time to start in prying a fool idea out of such a slow-working mind as that. Besides, with this hero of hers locked up so tight, why worry?

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